DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 153 136 CG 012 395

AUTHOR Dale, Emily Dunn
TITLE The American Family: Problems, Public Policy and Solutions. A Position Paper Invited for the Consideration of the Carter Transition Team.
PUB DATE Jan 77
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Child Abuse; Children; *Family Income; *Family Problems; Federal Programs; Health; *Marital Instability; *Policy Formation; *Sex Role; State of the Art Reviews; *Working Parents

ABSTRACT

This review details family problems in the United States. It reviews basic assumptions and future trends, advocates a structured public policy, and offers recommendations by which the total family structure may be strengthened. (MFD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED153136

THE AMERICAN FAMILY: PROBLEMS, PUBLIC POLICY AND SOLUTIONS

A Position Paper Invited for the Consideration

of the Carter Transition Team

by

Emily Dunn Dale, PhD.

Associate Professor of Sociology
Illinois Wesleyan University
Bloomington, Illinois 61701
January, 1977

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

E.D. Dale

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

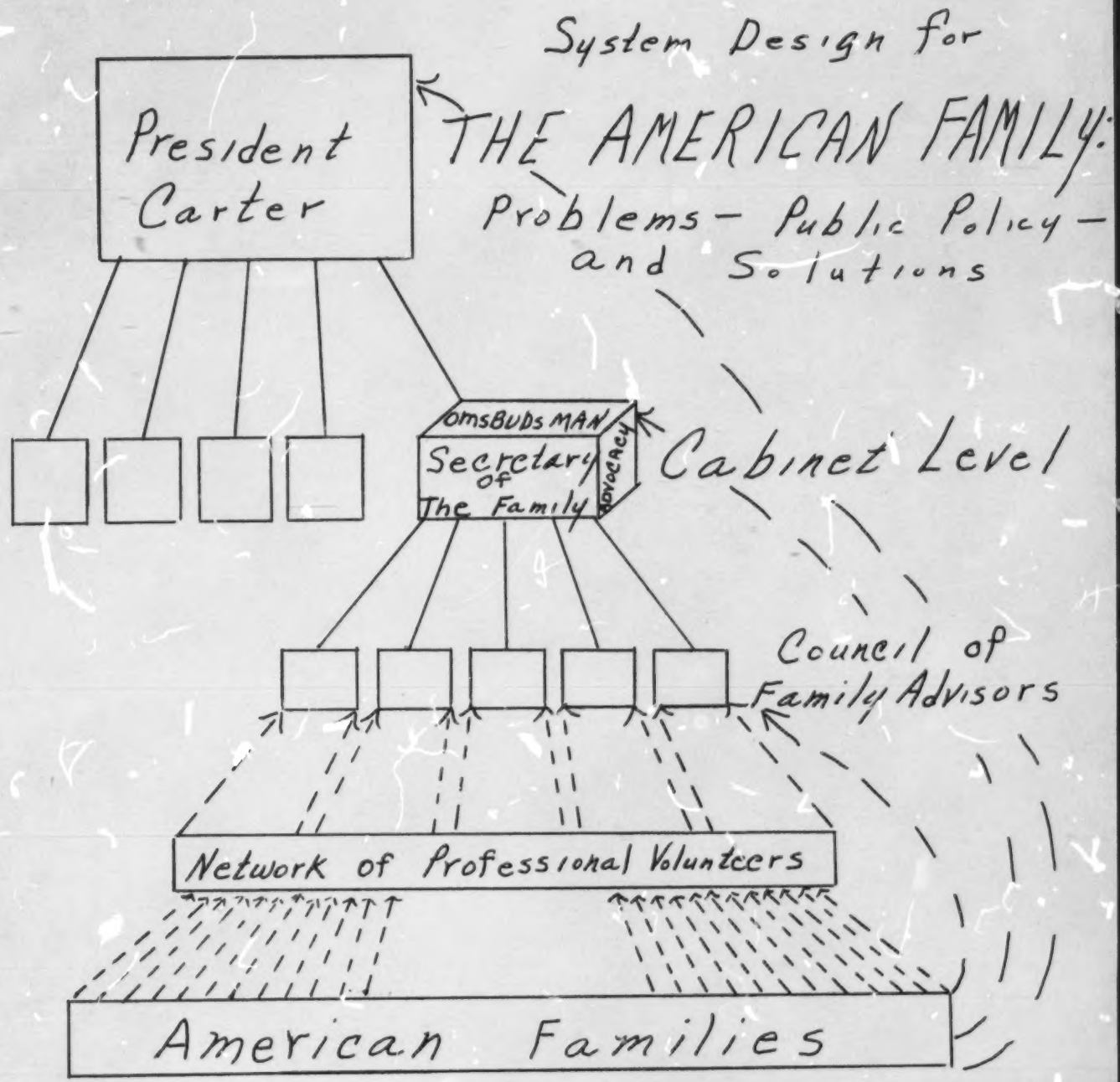
Copies (except appendix) to:

President Carter
Vice President Mondale
K. Z. Chavis
Frank Day (with appendix)
Helena Z. Lopata
Rae Lesser Blumberg
Hyman Rodman
Paul C. Glick

CG012395

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Representation of System Design	1
Introduction	2
Problems of the Family: A Summary	2
Basic Assumptions and Values	5
Recommendations: An Introduction	6
Recommendations for Policy and Structure	7
1. Cabinet-Level Position	8
2. Council of Family Advisors	9
3. Volunteer Support Network	9
4. White House Conference on Family	10
5. Government as Exemplary Employer	10
Some Alternatives	14
1. State Childcare	14
2. H.E.W. as Overseer	14
3. Recommendations from Paul C. Glick	14
Staffing Suggestions	16
Appendix - Materials referred to in body	
1. Helena Z. Lopata, Loyola of Chicago	
2. Rae Lesser Blumberg, U. of California, San Diego	
3. Hyman Rodman, U. of North Carolina	
4. Paul C. Glick, Bureau of Census	


System Design for
THE AMERICAN FAMILY:
Problems - Public Policy - and Solutions
President Carter
OMSBUDSMAN
Secretary of The Family
ADVOCACY
Cabinet Level
Council of Family Advisors
Network of Professional Volunteers
American Families

THE AMERICAN FAMILY: PROBLEMS, PUBLIC POLICY AND SOLUTIONS

A Position Paper For The Carter Transition Team

By

EMILY DUNN DALE, PhD.-

citizen, mother, grandmother, and associate professor of Sociology at

Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois 61701

This paper is structured as follows: (1) To highlight problems in the family system in the United States; (2) To reveal basic assumptions and values underlying the public policy and structure being advocated (3) Recommendations by means of which the family system could be strengthened; (4) Comments on what are perceived to be alternative, less constructive approaches; (5) Recommendations from Paul C. Glick and (6) Suggestions with respect to some qualified candidates for the necessary roles described in (3).

Problems of the Family: A Summary

The family system basic to our way of life, is deteriorating (the life expectancy of a marriage was 7 years in 1967, and has declined since then). Largely as a by-product, an increasing proportion of children under six are

being reared in single parent families. (There was a 71% increase between 1970 and 1975.)

Single parent families are usually female headed. (Now one in six children live in such homes, double the proportion of 25 years ago). Simultaneously, the proportion of adult males working has been steadily declining, and we may see a time when the percent of male and female breadwinners reaches parity, or comes very close to it.

The median income of female headed families is slightly above poverty level, around $6,400 per year. Close to 40% have incomes below $5,000.

There is an increase in the number of females deserting their families, though data are elusive and hard to find. A growing number of divorces involve cases in which neither parent wants custody of the children.

Sixty percent of the black female headed families have annual incomes below $5,000. In 1965, 71% of black children lived with both parents. By 1974, only 56% under 18 were with both parents.

There is greater likelihood among low income families of having three or more children, so the proportion of children in single parent families exceeds the proportion of single parent households. As of the June 27, 1976 issue of News from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, over 9 million children in 7.2 million families fall into this category.

The lack of adequate income, health care, housing, clothing, nutrition and socialization typifies the environment of children in single parent, female headed households.

Even in two parent, middle class households, a 25 year survey done by Urie Bronfenbrenner showed a decrease in all kinds of interaction between parents and their children. In terms of intimate interaction with infants, fathers averaged 38 seconds daily.

There is inadequate day care to compensate for the absence of both parents.

(Senate Bill 626 did not pass last year.)

Forty-eight percent of adult women are now working outside the home. In 1975, the worklife expectancy for all females was 25 years. The 1990 projected proportion of adult females in the workforce is 65%.

This leaves, and will increasingly leave, children inadequately supervised, a situation that guarantees inadequate socialization. Inadequate socialization contributes to asocial if not anti-social attitudes and behaviors. This in turn contributes to increased delinquency and crime. Income and crime are closely related, as shown by Fleisher. (He found that a 1% increase in income may result in a 2.5% decrease in delinquency in high delinquency areas.) There has been a 200% increase in arrests of children for serious crimes in the last 15 years.

Inordinate pressure on single parent households attempting to provide the livelihood and be homemakers and parents may very well account for at least some of the increased proportion of child abuse and neglect reported. (There has been a 141% increase in reported child abuse in Illinois in a single year, from 2,801 in 1975 to 6,748 in 1976.) The horrendous prospect of increased child abuse in the future is likely in view of the research that shows that an abused child is more likely to be an abusive parent. A 1970 national survey projected at least 2 million battered child cases a year, so Illinois is no exception to the rule.

The proportion of unplanned, unwanted children born varies by social class. It was 15% for the middle class and 33% for the lower class when last studied (about '72). An unwanted child is more likely to be abused and/or neglected, to do less well in school, and to engage in delinquent behavior.

The proportion of babies being born to unmarried teenagers is increasing, and the proportion of such mothers who opt to keep their babies, has skyrocketed. In 25, years, the rate of illegitimacy has doubled, to 10 per 100

live births.

Before I discuss how I believe government can respond, I want to explain my beliefs with respect to the family. They effect the recommendations which follow.

Basic Assumptions and Values

1. The family is the basic institution in society. Other institutions, including government, business, education, and welfare, should not be permitted to act in ways harmful to the family system.
2. The form of family may vary from extended to nuclear. What constitutes a family is essentially defined according to the beliefs of the individuals who forms the unit. This is a basic human freedom.
3. All individual members of a family are of equal value. Roles will vary according to family form and preference.
4. Husband and wife should have equal rights as well as responsibilities for contributing as they see fit to the welfare of their families. Government should formally acknowledge the monumental social and economic importance of that task.
5. Benign neglect of the family has resulted in having better-organized interest groups advocate policies and practices which promote their own advantage. The lack of conscious consideration of the family often results in negative, albeit unintended, effects.
6. The family has never been adequately represented in the halls of government. In our political system, the interests of the family must be as carefully and powerfully represented as are those of commerce, labor, the treasury, or any other major block.
7. Unless the nuclear family system which prevails in this society is given substantial consideration and support soon, it will become necessary to

exercise increasingly onerous social engineering and provide massive social services to raise, educate, and socialize an increasing proportion of our children. That option may be preferable in totalitarion societies, but would be inconsistent with the basic tenents of ours.

8. Couples who opt for marriage need to know as much as possible about the nature of the marital relationship, and should be prepared for it.
9. Couples who opt for parenthood have a need to know about the nature of that art/profession. They should be prepared to fulfill that responsibility.
10. Children have a right to a maximum amount of time, energy and oversight by both parents as they are growing up, especially during the crucial pre-school years.
11. Society has a right to expect parents to teach their children the meaning of social responsibility. In addition, society may provide group experiences for children which will contribute to the development of a socially aware value system.

As can be readily observed from this summary of problems, conditions prevailing at this time have been moving us toward an ever-increasing proportion of single parent, usually female-headed, family units. Why?

Recommendations: An Introduction

A prime condition for the emergence of female headed families is that the unit of property accumulation be the individual, regardless of sex. (Rae Lesser Blumberg, see appendix 2) It follows that if what we want to do is strengthen and integrate the whole family, then we must provide opportunities for couples to combine earning power, which would create a culture conducive to that goal. An important thing government can do is to create positions that can be corporately held and shared by couples, whether they work at the same or two other jobs. This would be especially important while the children

were at home.

Another point basic to consider is that if what is desired is to minimize the negative psychological and socio-economic effects of divorce and separation on children, then welfare policy which discriminates against males in the state-provided welfare system must be abolished. As it is, fathers are forced to abandon their families so that females may be eligible for subsistence through ADC. The courts are in philosophical collusion with the welfare system, since they operate almost exclusively on the Pro forma assumption that females should receive custody of children. This, regardless of who would be the better parent for each particular child.

Because these changes would help couples built interdependency, or at least salvage the debris from broken marriages, if the above recommendations were instituted, those who control the political economy, whether extra national or national, could expect the adequate but not excessive population, replacement needed for them to make adequate profit. Otherwise, the current decline in marriage and parenting might seriously erode population.

Problems in the family are so serious as to require other, new, major responses on the part of the government.

Recommendations for Policy and Structure

As implied in the assumptions, though I may be overdramatizing the situation, I believe it is fair to say that government has not even formally acknowledged that the family exists. Also, I believe it fair to say that the present policies and practices of government have at least indirectly contributed to the creation and exacerbation of the problems families are experiencing in this society.

If what the Carter administration wants to do is to turn this tide, there are a number of methods which I believe they can use which will help. I will list them and provide a rationale for each.

1. Establish a new, cabinet-level position, to be called Secretary of the Family. The job description would include acting as Omsbudsman/Advocate for families.

Rationale

The Omsbudsman Advocate role would be explicitly assigned to this Cabinet position. Complaints about such things as present tax policies, housing priorities and current legislation could be sent directly to the Secretary's office. To illustrate the point: Families have the lowest priority of any groups according to HUD guidelines. This is reflected in the fact that our local Housing Authority gives top priority to the aged, followed by veterans who may or may not have familes. Families needing four bedroom units have lowest priority (8% of the spaces built), and those needing 3 bedrooms have the next to the lowest (24% of all spaces built). Costs of educating one's children are not tax deductible, although gifts of Playboy Club memberships to business associates, are.

The symbolic and political importance of establishing a cabinet level position would send a compelling message to the country. It would say, "We recognize that the family is as important as commerce, industry, the economy and labor. We realize that the family provides the basic motivation for life and is our connection to the future."

People need to see that this government knows that the family is the axle ~~upon~~ for which other institutional wheels of the social system turn.

Establishing a cabinet level position would guarantee a supporting system to represent the interests of the family on a par with the other primary titular concerns of this society. At present we are doing far less for the family system than we do to promote our other major concerns.

Cabinet level appointment is essential if the plan intended specifically to help families to be intelligently integrated into the social scheme. Ideas

such as those of Hyman Rodman (see appendix 3) are so profoundly connected with economic planning, it becomes obvious that solving family problems cannot take place without careful examination of the effects proposals would have throughout the entire society.

Rodman suggests ". . . an income mainterance program. . . and a full employment program are urgently needed . . " to strengthen the self-image of ghetto breadwinners, stabilize their families, and enable heads of households to be more effective with their children.

Because of the complexity of the problems and the many kinds of expertise which would be required to deal with them, another recommendation (Helena Z. Lopata see appendix 1) would be:

2. To establish a Council of Family Advisors to work with the Secretary of the Family.

Rationale

Following a life cycle design, the best informed people in the country should be used as resource persons and advisors to help examine existing bureaucratic and legislative practice, and plan for future legislation and executive response. The cyclic approach would take into account the premarital state, courtship, marriage, parenting, and continue through retirement and aging, within the family context. There are people with expertise in each of these areas.

3. A Volunteer Support Network

Rationale

There is available to council experts a natural network of potential volunteers who care about families and are in touch with their problems. People working with troubled families, studying, and teaching about family problems are

natural allies and constitute a knowledgeable constituency to assist the Secretary of Family and Council. They could be enlisted to help identify problem areas and pool ideas for solutions.

Contacts with such persons could be spearheaded by such groups as the Committee on Public Issues and the Family of the American Sociological Association, the National Council on Family Relations, etc. These are the "unpaid lobbiests" upon whom government could call for help.

4. The Secretary, supported by the Council of Family Advisors and assisted by the volunteer network, would be responsible for planning a White House Conference on the Family, to take place in the second year of the Carter administration.

Rationale

Among other topics which groups previously mentioned might believe should be included, would be the status of women in the family, sex role socialization of children, the male as parent/homemaker, family planning and job pairing. To these should be added specific topics relevant to each cabinet-related specialization, such as how policies in the Department of Labor effect families, how the policies of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare effects the family, etc. Serious reconsideration of a family assistance plan should be a major focus for discussion.

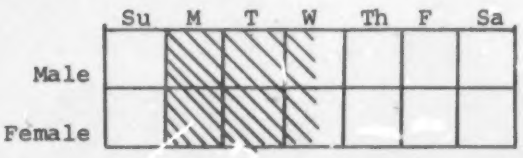
5. Government should become the leading advocate-exemplar in creating part-time jobs which could lend themselves to pairing, e.g., two people would share one full-time job.

Rationale

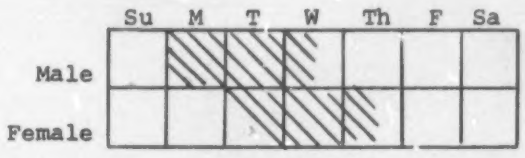
To illustrate this point, I've worked out some of the possible plans. If both couples worked part-time, they could work two and a half days simultaneously

at similar or different kinds of jobs and make provisions for other child care during that time (Plan I). They could take turns working part-time, so that together they would have a five day job, and one or the other of them could be at home with their children all of the time (Plan II). Their jobs could overlap so that the child or children would need other supervision for only a small part of the week (Plan III). Still another approach would be for one to work mornings and the other to work afternoons (Plan IV). This would permit private time with the children for each parent. It has the disadvantage of minimizing time that the couple has together. (However, please note that this approach still consumes a current 8 - 5 schedule traditionally performed by a single breadwinner.)

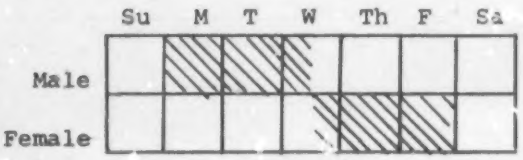
PLAN I



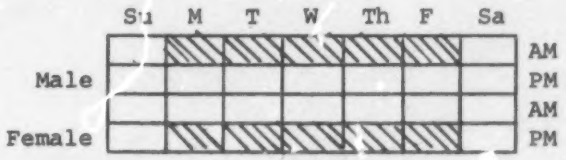
PLAN III



PLAN II



PLAN IV



▨ Time spent on job away from home

☐ Off of job

The effects of pairing will be negligible as long as the jobs offered are of the same class as those currently available on a part-time basis. Clearly, government needs to take the lead in opening up topflight, challenging jobs following this model. (How about using pairing for the Secretary of the family?) Halving the income from such jobs, as these could more easily accommodate a

reasonable standard of living.

A beneficent by-product of pairing is that the number of such jobs double those otherwise available. Income would be curtailed in comparison with that available for two full-time workers, but income redistribution would be substantially increased throughout the population. This would curtail as greata need for crisis provisions required when there is only one breadwinner who cannot continue contributing to the family support.

In comparison with full-time employment by both parents, some families with pre-schoolers would not earn enough from the jobs of two part-time breadwinners, even though costs of day care could be lowered dramatically. For them, a Family Assistance Plan would be required. What I am especially concerned about is that both parents of pre-schoolers be able to spend time, with their children. As I have stated previously, children have a right to expect time, energy and interaction from their mothers and fathers.

Other important consequences which would flow from such a scheme are as follows:

1. Women would no longer fall behind in whatever skills, seniority and rank they had before becoming a parent. Currently they return after a ten year absence to find their skills have become obsolete and they have fallen far behind in the race for advancement.
2. With the kind of social support this program implies, the woman who worked part-time outside the home while sharing childcare with the father could do so in a comparatively guilt free atmosphere.
3. When half the families' income is earned by the wife, the husband's incentive would be enormously increased to join his wife in combating current discriminatory practices against females in the market place.
4. The male would have far more opportunity to provide guidance to, and be an effective role model for, his children. He would be able to develop

his own capacity for fathering, a luxury too seldom available to men in the traditional, full-time breadwinner roles.

5. The pairing work would be of superior quality, since research has shown part-time workers to be more efficient than full-time employees, conventional wisdom and discriminatory pay to the contrary.

6. When government demonstrates the superiority of this style of work, both on an economic and personal level, it could be expected to spread to business and industry. There, it would further generate jobs and family interdependence.

7. Women would be able to come under Social Security on their own, no longer running the risk of earning no coverage if they opt to remain at home. (At the present time, if the marriage disolves within twenty years, the wife has no benefits.)

8. Women would more fully appreciate the pressures and demands of market place, breadwinning, thereby more fully understanding their husbands experience.

9. Men will then be sharing homemaking and parenting responsibilities and more fully appreciate the effort required for that kind of work. The status of being a homemaker and parent will be enhanced thereby.

10. On the basis of the fact that most Americans marry for companionship and emotional support, and that the broader the base of common experience, the greater the likelihood a mutually satisfying companionate relationship can occur, I believe marriages involving such an arrangement should be more lasting, stable, and happy.

11. Women who are involved in satisfying, renumerative work outside the home will self-regulate fertility. Thus we would avoid being driven to radical methods such as those being used currently in some provinces of India. (Which involve requiring forced sterilization and even criminal penalties

for over-production.)

Some Alternatives

I suppose that what I am not saying is about as important as what I am advocating. An alternative position would be one which would advocate relegating child rearing to governmental agencies. I am personally opposed to this solution. It could too easily contribute to over-control by government, and deprive parents and children of important, intimate, and individualized interaction. I think the majority in this society still want to reserve these rights and obligations for the family.

I am not advocating assigning these tasks to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. That agency has probably authored more policies and practices which have been downright detrimental to the family than any other single bureau. To wit: in the heartland conservative state of Illinois, H.E.W., in conjunction with state-augmented priorities, increasingly benefit children as they move from the natural family, (where A.D.C. payments are $70./mo.) to the foster home ($125./mo.), from the institutional childcare setting ($1,100./mo.) to so-called therapeutic group homes ($2,010./mo.), and even from correctional facilities ($2,500./mo.) to mental health institutions ($6,000./mo.). They have forced fathers to leave homes so that mothers and children can become eligible dependents who get locked into a self-perpetuating culture of poverty. Furthermore, the association in the public eye of H.E.W. with poverty programs is such that to assign concern for families to this agency would lead to rejection of its initiatives.

Additional Suggestions

There are a lot of other possibilities and programs which could be added. Some of the important recommendations mentioned by Paul C. Glick (see appendix 4) in his address to the National Council on Family Relations in 1974 were:

"1. The development of the contents for more practical and effective training at home, in the high schools, and in colleges about how young persons can make a wise selection of their marriage partner and how they can keep their marriage alive and healthy over a long period of time-and about how they can use reasonable criteria to decide whether it is any longer practical to keep their marriage intact (Broderick and Bernard, 1969).

2. Designing a scientifically tested and appealing system for selecting a marriage partner, for bringing together young men and women who would have a much higher probability of establishing an enduring and satisfying marriage than could be expected through the almost universally haphazard system that now exists-at the same time realizing that the rational approach must be supplemented by the strength of emotional appeal (Glick, 1967).

3. Acceptance by the public of the concept of periodic marriage checkups through visits to highly expert marriage counselors (when a sufficient supply becomes available), with these visits occurring in a manner analogous to periodic physical checkups that are voluntarily made, and with the visits considered urgent when a seemingly dangerous marital condition is developing.

4. Continuing modernization of marriage and divorce laws, which would tend to encourage couples to take much more seriously their entry into marriage but not quite so seriously as some couples do the hazards of ending a marriage that is no longer worthy of continuation.

5. Development of child care facilities staffed by highly professional personnel, so that more mothers can feel free to maximize the alternatives available for the use of their time while their children are growing up-provided that careful attention is given in choosing the ways in which the additional free time is used (Campbell, 1973; Low and Spindler, 1968).

6. Finally, programs to increase the appeal of experiencing a good marriage, including the continued collection and dissemination of knowledge about how to cultivate such a marriage-so that more emphasis can be placed on building up the positive side of married life, in a period when so many stimuli that reach the public have the effect of making non-marriage appear to be much more desirable (Mace and Mace, 1974)."

With the basic ideas and structure I have suggested, I believe the future of the family could be one with hope. I believe it would have positive effects on the morale of the entire country, because it would show our government recognized what most of us realize-that our families come first, regardless of how we make our livelihood.

Staffing Suggestions

The importance of the quality of the person who would be the omsbudsman/advocate, first Secretary of the Family, is crucial to its success. For that role, I would recommend you examine the background and credentials of Jessie Bernard. If she would consider it, I think she would be a superb choice.

There are many well-qualified candidates for the Council of Family Advisor. Among Sociologists and Anthropologists who stand out in my experience are Helena Z. Lopata, with expertise on housewives and widowhood, Bernard Farber, expert on marital roles, Margaret Mead for her expertise on cross-cultural comparison, Ira Reiss and J. Richard Udry, generalists, and E. E. LeMasters, who specializes, in the study of parenting. Paul C. Glick would be invaluable as consulting demographer on the family. Too, having offered the ideas, I'd like to see that they were put to work.

Thanks for challenging me to articulate my position more fully. It has been a fruitful and fulfilling task. When, in the course of the campaign, I heard candidate Jimmy Carter acknowledge that the family system is in trouble and poorly represented in government, I believed the administration might be receptive to reconstruction to deal with the problems. This statement represents my best efforts within the time limits permitted, to be of assistance in pursuing that goal.

Thanks for listening!